A–6 taking off from *USS Independence* near Taiwan.

U.S. Navy (Stephen Batiz)

Recipe for Failure

Centralization and U.S. Joint Forces Command

By SUSAN E. MERDINGER

Events over the last decade have revealed that the command structure of the Armed Forces, as manifest in the unified command plan, is outmoded. The promise of technology—better, faster, and cheaper—has led many to conclude that we can do a lot more with a lot less. A combination of technological upgrades and fiscal constraints would imply that streamlining commands will cut costs, increase efficiencies, and enhance capabilities. Not often considered in this equation is the impact that centralization has on the warfighting CINCs and their ability to win conflicts.

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Centralization versus Decentralization

In September 1999, Secretary of Defense William Cohen announced a change in the unified command plan that redesignated U.S. Atlantic Command (ACOM) as U.S. Joint Forces Command (JFCOM). Although not many details on its responsibilities were elaborated, the National Defense Panel proposed in 1997 that such a command would be:

the common force provider of combat-ready forces to all other commands for joint and combined operations. This command would be responsible for the force readiness and training of all active and Reserve components based in the United States . . . for developing and validating joint doctrine for the approval of the Joint Chiefs; conducting joint experimentation; directing joint battle laboratories; and overseeing

other joint innovation and experimentation efforts described elsewhere in this report. The Joint Forces Command is responsible for all joint modeling, simulation analysis, and concept development.

This one-stop-shopping CINC will control a wide range of activities. Proponents of centralization are correct in pointing to cost savings, better use of technology, tighter control of information, and focused problem solving. But there are risks. In analyzing why failures occur in war, Eliot Cohen and John Gooch refer to the "organizational dimension of strategy." The ability of an organization to handle challenges, especially on higher levels, is often ignored. Expecting too much from one command could sacrifice warfighting effectiveness for peacetime efficiency.

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The following article does not attempt to develop a roadmap for JFCOM. Instead it raises concerns over the establishment of new command structures. The tendency to regard centralization as an organizational panacea demands an examination of the opposite view—the adverse effects of creating new commands and their impact on the warfighting equation.

A Case Study in Failure

Our northern neighbors have provided valuable lessons on centralization of a modern force. Since the Canadian Forces Reorganization Act of 1967, that nation's military has centralized nearly all of its organizational structure. The act abolished separate services and formed a single defense establishment with coequal land, sea, and air branches. After an extensive management review in 1972, further centralization integrated the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces Headquarters into one staff, the National Defence Headquarters (NDHQ). These changes had far reaching effects and resulted in a breakdown of discipline during peace operations in Somalia.

Training the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battle Group for duty in Somalia revealed a lack of innovative thinking and a predilection for predictability. It relied on preparing troops who

Canadians patrolling in Somalia.

Canadian Airborne Regiment (Ed Dixon)

were trained for high intensity conflict to operate at the lower end of the continuum as well. Moreover, it was believed that additional training could be accomplished in the period between warning order and deployment, which could be a matter of days or months. Finally, since the unit had been prepared for a peace operation in the western Sahara, only minimal training was deemed necessary for a deployment to Somalia.

Following an extensive study, the Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia concluded that there was no "clearly defined and conceptualized training system for peacekeeping missions that reflected changes in the peacekeeping field at the time" and ascribed the problem to the unified structure of the armed forces. Because of poor organization and training the unit lacked the stamina and flexibility to rapidly adapt to the dynamics of changing missions.

What You Really Get

For Canada, centralization led to a diarchy within NDHQ that generated confusion between military and civilian components. By the mid-1980s weaknesses began to appear in the unification experience. As one critique declared:

The Canadian army is in crisis. Its command structure is ineffective. Its soldiers are demoralized. Its equipment is outmoded and inadequate for many of the tasks to which it is assigned. The causes of the problem can be traced to . . . political indecision, peacetime neglect, and budgetary cutbacks. But perhaps most crucially, the ability of the army to carry out its essential function, which is to maintain the capacity to fight wars, has been undermined by the process of bureaucratization initiated by passage of the Unification Act of 1968 and reinforced by later structural changes. This process has transformed and disfigured the military command structure at every level, from the Chief of Defense Staff to the so-called Hellyer corporal, with disastrous results.[1]

The failure of centralization to adapt to conditions in Somalia offers a significant lesson for American forces. In its training plan for 1997–2000, ACOM provided a roadmap for its successor organization, JFCOM, through a three-tiered system. The first tier is unit level training performed by service components, the second consists of joint tactical field exercises that enhance service and multinational interoperability, and the third engages joint task force commanders.

The Canadian Mission to Somalia

In 1992 the United Nations, concerned with the breakdown in the national government of Somalia and the specter of famine, sought international help to provide food and restore law and order. In December, after months of planning and training and a shift in mission from peacekeeping to peace enforcement, Canadian troops were deployed as part of a coalition force. Many belonged to the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battle Group (CARBG), composed largely of personnel from the Canadian Airborne Regiment.

On the evening of March 16, 1993, members of CARBG bound and beat a Somali youth near Belet Huen, an incident which drew international attention. In 1995 the Canadian government launched a multi-year public investigation through the Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia. It was one of the most exhaustive investigations in Canadian military history. The resulting report, based on 38,000 pages of testimony from 116 witnesses and 150,000 documents and countless published sources was released in July 1997 as a five-volume study entitled *Dishonoured Legacy: The Lessons of the Somalia Affair*.

Canadian National Defence Headquarters (Snashall)

U.S. and Thai personnel, Cobra Gold '96.

DOD (Stephen Batiz)

JFCOM control of second tier training for CONUS-based active and Reserve forces raises concern over its ability to adapt to the training requirements of the geographic CINCs. Under such an expanded charter, can one joint command be expected to possess the innovation and flexibility demanded by regional idiosyncrasies? Would not the scope of the JFCOM charter mean less detail and more pro forma training regardless of the need by theater CINCs for mission essential tasks that satisfy their respective training needs? And what about the innovation which the services bring to training on this level? Their contribution would be reduced if JFCOM controlled training levels for CONUS-based forces. Predictability and uniformity must not become part of joint training in an effort to achieve efficiency. On the other hand, assigning second tier training to only one CINC runs the risk of neutralizing the flexibility and innovation gained from the interaction among unified commands and service components.

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Innovation is also crucial in training with allies because U.S. forces are likely to fight wars as part of a coalition, which requires more combined training in varied environments. ACOM set the standard for combined training in its *Joint Training Plan, 1997–2000,* which states: "Joint and NATO doctrine will be the foundation that fundamentally shapes thinking and training for joint and multinational military operations." As the organizational concept for JFCOM evolves, it might slip into a Eurocentric cookie cutter mindset that is not adaptable to every theater.

That is certainly true when applying a multinational training paradigm to the Pacific theater. U.S. Pacific Command (PACOM) is the largest regional command, encompassing 105 million square miles and 44 countries with some 60 percent of the world population. Of seventeen CJCS-sponsored exercises conducted in the area, seven are combined and none are multinational. Moreover, adopting NATO training as a template is quite difficult not only because European systems, tactics, and doctrine are not applicable on the Korean peninsula, but because its documentation cannot be released to Asian allies without concurrence from every NATO member.

The current command structure is not broken. Under Title 10, PACOM can train forces for contingencies by incorporating theater-unique requirements while simultaneously accommodating its bilateral training partners. This would be lost under the JFCOM approach with one-size-fits-all combined training. If CINCs are expected to shape the environment, they must have training tools to forge alliances and keep forces well honed to the needs of both allies and friends in the region.

JTF staff training on the third tier appears to be the most suited for JFCOM. As the driver of joint training on this level, it can sharpen the

skills of senior personnel and staffs by integrating service expertise to foster jointness at the highest levels.

Creating Complexity

Centralization establishes a more complex organization that slows the flow of information and reduces accuracy. Added layers require more time for coordinating change. Creating a single command to train and provide all CONUS-based forces to regional CINCs introduces another node in the warfighting process.

Imagine how it might work. PACOM would request forces through the Joint Staff which, in turn, would identify the requirement to JFCOM; that command would direct its components to nominate ready forces; JFCOM would seek the validation of those forces by the Joint Staff, which then would notify JFCOM and the unified CINC. Isn't this more complex than the current system under which PACOM requests validation for its contingency from the Joint Staff, identifies its own trained forces, and employs them? And what guarantees that at the end of this long "do-loop" of requests and validations this new system won't identify the wrong forces for the regional CINC?

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Students of organizational behavior have found that "effective supervision requires that the supervisor's attention not be divided among too many subordinates."[2] The lesson is that the more complex the organization, the more complex the participants; the more complex the participants, the greater the competition for resources. The ability to regulate the larger organization and the internal competition it generates becomes a major span of control issue.

JFCOM will also spur competition on many levels in a resource constrained environment. Internally it must allocate resources among demands for joint training, doctrine, experimentation, integration, and providing forces for unified CINCs. Externally it will compete with other CINCs for scarce assets as well as the services for finite training funds and time. This is a critical point. Where will the funding and time it takes to train jointly be generated? The short answer is from the services. But this approach endangers the backbone of joint training the services provide. One can hardly expect joint proficiency if the services have not mastered their own functional areas. Joint training compliments service training but it is no substitute. Forces that have attained the required level of service proficiency are integrated into the joint arena to form a complete warfighting team. Gains made in joint capability at the expense of service core competencies will not improve overall effectiveness and come at the expense of readiness. Actual military misfortunes "... can never be justly laid at the door of any one commander. They are failures of the organization, not of the individual."[3]

The need for change is not at issue here. Rather it is the rush to embrace an organizational paradigm that offers benefits in dollars but no discernable gain to the capability that really counts, warfighting. Will this new organization produce a force that is flexible, responsive, and adaptable? Or will it become a lumbering, overburdened system whose principal accomplishment is providing symmetry to an organizational chart? **JFQ**

Readiness exercise at Fort Dix.

1st Combat Camera Squadron (Cecilio M. Ricardo, Jr.)

NOTES

[1] Review of *Significant Incident: Canada's Army, The Airborne and the Murder in Somalia* by David Bercuson, http://www.mclelland.com/bercuson.htm (August 3, 1998).

[2] Hal G. Rainey, *Understanding and Managing Public Organizations*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), p. 272.

[3] Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Macmillan, 1990), p. 3.